

dent in Maes' painting during the 1660s to market pressure, saying that Maes abandoned Rembrandt's way of painting "when he took up portraiture and discovered that young ladies would rather be painted in white than in brown." At this time, Maes not only altered his style, but also completely changed his signature from block letters to a more elegant form. Were it not for the existence of transitional paintings signed in the earlier manner but showing signs of the artist's later style, we might well conclude that the late portraits were painted by an entirely different N. Maes.

In 1673 Maes moved to Amsterdam, where he died in December 1693.

Notes

1. Houbraken reported that Maes was born in 1632, but a Dordrecht archivist discovered the correct date: see Martin 1942, 512, note 325.

Bibliography

Houbraken 1753, 2: 273–277.
Veth 1890.
HdG 1907–1927, 6 (1916): 473–605.
Valentiner 1924.
Sumowski 1979–1992, 8 (1984): 3951–4489.
Sumowski 1983, 3: 1951–2174.
Philadelphia 1984: 239–242.
Brown/MacLaren 1992: 239.

1937.1.63 (63)

An Old Woman Dozing over a Book

c. 1655
Oil on canvas, 82.2 x 67 (32 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 26 $\frac{3}{8}$)
Andrew W. Mellon Collection

Inscriptions

At upper right above keys: *N. MAES*

Technical Notes: The support, a medium-weight, plain-woven fabric, has been lined with the tacking margins trimmed. Cusping visible along all edges indicates the original dimensions have been retained. A long horizontal tear in the book is slightly depressed. A smooth off-white ground application was followed by a dark imprimatura layer, applied overall and incorporated into the background.

Paint was applied thinly in all but the flesh tones with low impasto in light passages and transparent glazing in the darks. Wet-into-wet blending softens the edges of the controlled brushstrokes. The proper right hand and proper left side of the face are severely abraded and awkwardly retouched. The signature is reinforced. A thick, matte, discolored varnish covers the surface. No conservation has been carried out since acquisition.

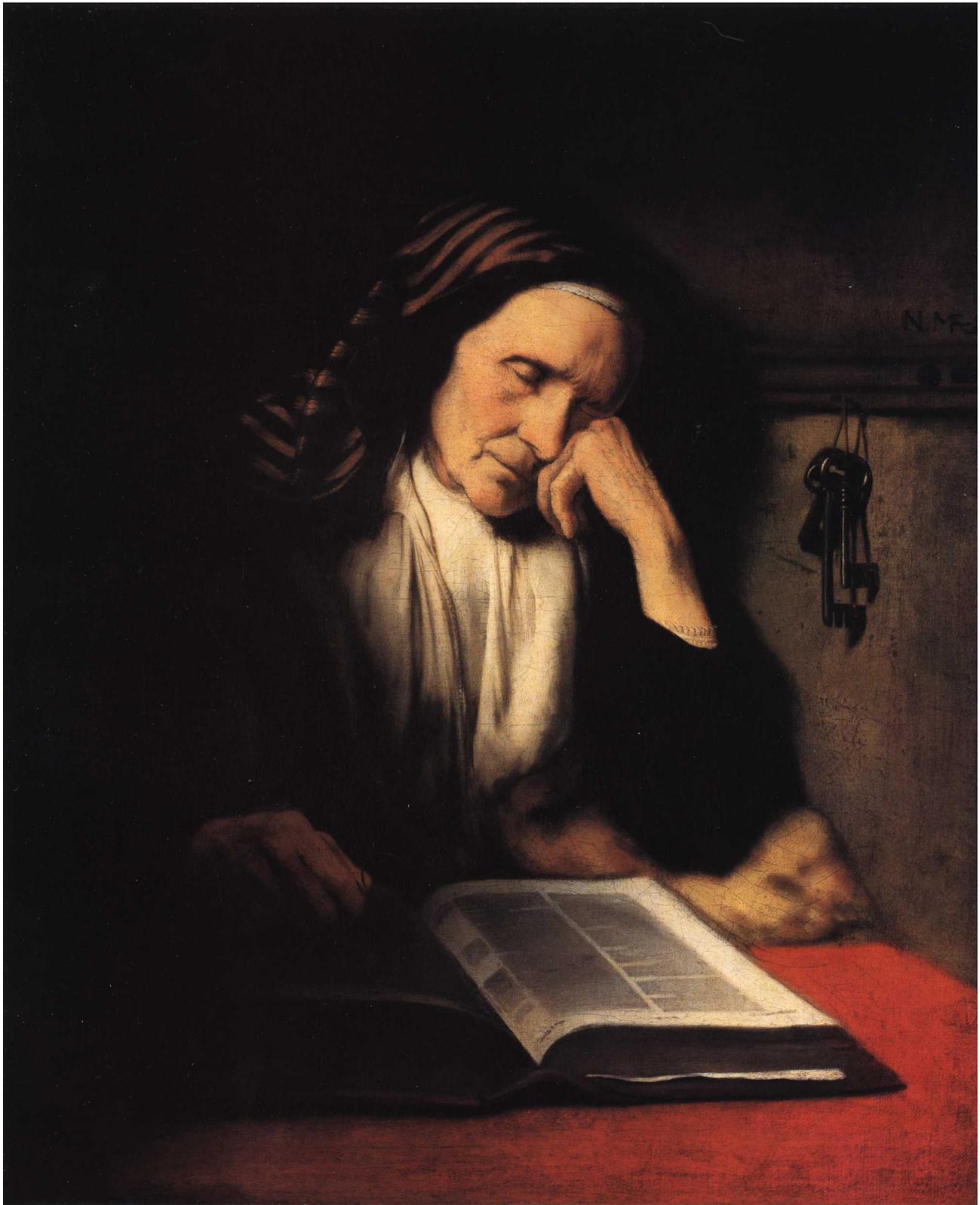
Provenance: Anonymous sale, Worcester, in 1856; Thomas Grove Smith [d. 1879], Rashwood House, Droitwich, Worcestershire; by inheritance to his son, Herbert George Smith [d. 1918], Apsey House, Batheaston, Somerset;¹ (Arthur J. Sulley & Co., London, in 1919). (Possibly with Thomas Agnew & Sons, London, c. 1920).² Nils B. Hersloff, Baltimore, and East Orange, New Jersey, by 1933; (consigned to M. Knoedler & Co., New York, April 1933–May 1934 and January 1935–April 1936);³ purchased 16 April 1936 by The A. W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, Pittsburgh.

Exhibited: *Autumn Exhibition*, Victoria Art Gallery, Bath, 1900, no. 41. *Exhibition of Twenty Masterpieces (1400–1800) in Aid of King George V's Jubilee Trust*, M. Knoedler & Co., London, 1935, no. 10. *Bilder des Alters*, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Braunschweig, 1993–1994, no. 44, repro.

SEATED AT A TABLE in a darkened room, an old woman leans her head on the back of her hand, having fallen asleep over her book. Her right hand, which is vaguely distinguishable in the shadow, rests on the book and holds her reading spectacles. Hanging from a nail in the molding on the wall to her left are three large keys. The mood of the painting is somber and quiet. The light that falls on her face from the upper left also illuminates the keys, book, and red tablecloth, but most of her body and background are thrown into deep shadow.

Maes explored the theme of a sleeping woman a number of times in the mid-1650s, shortly after he left Rembrandt's studio. Invariably these paintings have an admonitory character, for the woman is always shown sleeping instead of fulfilling her duties and responsibilities. In *The Idle Servant* of 1655 (National Gallery, London, inv. no. 207), Maes made his point by having a gesturing woman point out the irresponsible servant to the viewer.⁴ Dirty pots and pans lie at the woman's feet, and behind her a cat steals a chicken. As if the point needed reinforcement, Maes also placed the sleeping maid in a pose that was well known as a representation of Acedia (Sloth) (fig. 1). He clearly intended to convey a comparable message in his representations of women sleeping over their books, particularly when the book was the Bible, as is the case here.

The identification of the book as a Bible can be made through comparison with a related painting in Brussels (fig. 2), in which this same Bible lies opened to the first page of the Book of Amos. Throughout most of this text the Lord describes how he will no longer overlook the misdemeanors of the Israelites and intends to punish them like anyone else. Reinforcing the message that the woman's behavior cannot be condoned is the fact that her lacemaking, a symbol of domestic virtue, also goes unattended.⁵



Nicolaes Maes, *An Old Woman Dozing over a Book*, 1937.1.63



Fig. 1. Jerome Weirix, after P. Galle, *Acedia*, engraving, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1953

Finally, the hourglass, propping open the book, and the extinguished candle in the niche are symbols of the transitoriness of life. Since life is fleeting, the shirking of responsibilities signifies an unfulfilled existence in the eyes of both man and God.⁶

The message in the Washington painting is less explicit than in the examples from London and Brussels because the iconographic elements have been greatly reduced. Still, the underlying theme is clearly the same. The woman also assumes the pose of sloth; the only accessories, other than the Bible and spectacles, are the keys hanging on the wall. Traditionally, keys suggest responsibility; left unattended, they indicate her failure to uphold her duties. Keys, however, have many metaphorical associations, among them, by association with the keys of Saint Peter, entry into heaven. Since a key also hangs on the back wall in the Brussels painting, where themes of sloth and transitoriness of life are both present, they too may carry such dual symbolism. Falling asleep over one's Bible is not a means for discovering the keys to heaven. Indeed, in

another metaphorical sense of the work, the Bible provides us with keys for understanding life and guiding our salvation. As it lies unread, these keys are neglected. Similarly, spectacles, which serve to improve vision and sharpen our awareness, are effective only when used. An old Dutch proverb reads: "What good is the candle or eyeglasses if the owl does not want to see."⁷ The devotion with which the woman in a Maes painting in the Worcester Art Museum prays (fig. 3), with her awareness of the transitoriness of life evident in the skull and hourglass on the table before her, is a far more acceptable exemplar than that seen in either the Brussels or Washington paintings.⁸

Although *An Old Woman Dozing over a Book* is not dated, it must be from around 1655, when Rembrandt's influence on Maes' style was still strong. The broad touch, the dark palette with the deep reds of the tablecloth, and the strong chiaroscuro effects are comparable to effects found in Rembrandt's paintings from the mid-1640s.

The moralizing character that is so predominant in Maes' genre paintings of the mid-1650s, however,

Fig. 2. Nicolaes Maes, *An Old Woman Asleep before a Bible*, c. 1655, oil on canvas, Brussels, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts





Fig. 3. Nicolaes Maes, *An Old Woman Praying*, c. 1655, oil on canvas, Massachusetts, Worcester Art Museum

has no direct prototype in Rembrandt's paintings or in those of his other pupils and followers from the late 1640s and early 1650s, when Maes was in Amsterdam. Indeed, depictions by Rembrandt and his school of old women actively reading inevitably invoked the sitter's pious nature.⁹ Maes' moralizing images were made after his return to Dordrecht and after his marriage to the widow of a preacher in January 1654. Dordrecht had a strong Calvinist tradition, and themes that stressed moral responsibility may have had a ready market.

Many of the props Maes used in this work reappear in other paintings from this period. So too does the model, who is in both the Brussels and Worcester paintings,¹⁰ and in the latter wears the identical striped headdress as here.¹¹ Although the identity of the model is not known, she was in all probability a relative. One wonders if Maes followed Rembrandt's example and used his mother for his representations of old women in these strongly didactic works.

Notes

1. The early provenance for this painting comes from a three-page typewritten pamphlet concerning the work written by W. Roberts in 1919. It was probably produced for Sulley and Co., London, and is currently in the library at M. Knoedler & Co., New York.

2. Handwritten note by Frits Lugt in a copy of a 1935 Knoedler exhibition catalogue (now at the RKD): "fraai, heb ick bij Agnew ± 1920 gemist."

3. On 7 April 1933 the picture was received by Knoedler, on consignment from "H. B. Hersloff, Compania De Trafico Y Formento" (no address given, transaction no. CA 513 in stockbook). It was returned to the consigner on 8 May 1934, but returned again in January 1935 (transaction CA 768, again from "H. B. Hersloff"). The painting is listed in the 1935 Knoedler exhibition catalogue as having come from the collection of "Nils B. Hersloff, Esq.," however, rather than "H. B.," as was entered in the normally reliable Knoedler stockbooks. (Stockbook information kindly provided by Nancy C. Little, librarian at M. Knoedler & Co., New York).

4. For a discussion of this theme see Robinson 1987, 283–313.

5. For a discussion of the symbolism in this work see E. de Jongh in Amsterdam 1976, 143.

6. De Jongh in Amsterdam 1976, 143, quoting Johan de Brune, *Banck-Werk van Goede Gedachten* (Middelburg, 1657), 287, no. 728 ('Ledigheyd'): "Aen 't verlies van den tijd hanght het verlies van de eeuwige zaligheyd."

7. Heinrich Schwarz and Volker Plagemann, "Eule," in *Reallexikon zur deutschen Kunstgeschichte* 6 (1973): 267–322 (n.b. 308), fig. 28. "Wat baetes kaers of bril, als den uijl niet sien en wil." (See Amsterdam 1976, 247, cat. 65.)

8. Wayne Franits in Braunschweig 1993, 174, associates the warm clothes the woman wears in the Washington painting with the belief that the body becomes cold and dry in old age as it approaches death. He, thus, sees the character of the clothing as reinforcing the theme of transitoriness that otherwise exists in the painting. Arguing against this theory, however, is the fact that the very alert woman in the Worcester painting is dressed warmly as well.

9. Gregory Rubinstein has noted that the theme of a woman reading a book only developed in Dutch painting around 1630, perhaps as a result of a contemporary increase of literacy among women. In the following decades many painters depicted old women reading; it would be interesting to investigate the reasons for the introduction and popularity of this motif. See, for example, Rembrandt, *Rembrandt's Mother in the Guise of the Prophetess Anna* (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. no. A 3066); Rembrandt and Workshop, *An Old Lady with a Book*, NGA 1937.1.73; and Gerard Dou, *Old Woman Reading* (Rijksmuseum, inv. no. A 2627).

10. This same model also appears in *A Woman Spinning* (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. no. A246) and *An Old Woman Peeling Apples* (Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, inv. no. 819C).

11. Robinson 1984, 540, note 6, has observed that Maes also used this cloth in his *Dismissal of Hagar*, 1653 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. no. 1971.1.73), and the *Sacrifice of Isaac*, c. 1655–1658 (Alfred Bader Collection, Milwaukee).

References

- 1919 Bode: 68 (possibly a reference to 1937.1.63).
- 1924 Valentiner: 72, no. 33, repro.
- 1941 NGA: 118.
- 1949 Mellon: 89, repro.
- 1965 NGA: 80.
- 1968 NGA: 71, repro.
- 1974 Worcester Art Museum, 1: 112–114 (entry by Seymour Slive).

1975 NGA: 208–209, repro.
1976 Walker: 286–287, repro.
1979–1992 Sumowski, 8 (1984): 4066, 4084.
1983 Sumowski, 3: 2019, 2021, 2022, 2094, cat. 1368,
color repro.

1984 Philadelphia: 241, note 2.
1984 Robinson: 540–544.
1985 NGA: 240, repro.

Gabriel Metsu

1629–1667

GABRIEL METSU was born in Leiden in January 1629, only two months before the death of his father, the Flemish painter Jacques Metsue. In 1644, at the age of fifteen, Gabriel Metsu is recorded as one of a group of artists who were lobbying for the establishment of a Leiden Guild of Saint Luke, and in 1648 he became a founder-member of the organization. With the exception of short absences in the early 1650s, he spent the next decade in Leiden.¹ By July 1657, however, he had moved to Amsterdam. On 12 April 1658 he married Isabella de Wolff, a relative of the Haarlem classicist painter Pieter de Grebber (c. 1600–1652/1653). In January of the next year, Metsu became a citizen of Amsterdam, where he died in 1667 at the age of only thirty-eight.

It has been assumed that Metsu must have studied with Gerard Dou (q.v.), Leiden's leading genre painter during the 1640s. This assumption may well be correct but is not without problems, given that early works from Metsu's Leiden period tend to be executed in a fairly broad and fluid manner, far removed from the meticulously crafted, small-scale paintings of Dou and the other Leiden *fijnschilders*. With the possible exception of the local painter Jan Steen (q.v.), Metsu, in fact, seems to have been influenced more by the Utrecht artists Jan Baptist Weenix (1621–c. 1660) and Nicolaus Knüpfer (c. 1603–1655). Interestingly, after moving to Amsterdam, Metsu's style demonstrates more of the high level of detail and finish associated with the Leiden school.

The influence of several other artists—notably Johannes Vermeer (q.v.), Gerard ter Borch (q.v.), and Pieter de Hooch (q.v.)—is sometimes very evident in Metsu's work. Despite the existence of a sizeable number of dated paintings, however, these influences occur without any clear chronological pattern, and it is difficult to establish a firm structure for Metsu's stylistic development.

Metsu's most widely acclaimed paintings are the elegant genre pictures, generally depicting a small number of relatively large figures within an upright composition. In addition to indoor genre scenes, he painted a few depictions of outdoor markets, religious scenes, portraits, and still lifes.

His only known pupil was the genre and portrait painter Michiel van Musscher (1645–1705).

Notes

1. While annotations in the guild book for 1650 and 1651 by Metsu's name state that he had left the city, subsequent documents confirm that this absence was of a short duration; see Robinson 1974, 12.

Bibliography

Houbraken 1753, 3: 32, 40–42, 51, 211.
Smith 1829–1842, 4 (1833): 70–110; 9 (1842): 517.
HdG 1907–1927, 1 (1907): 253–335.
Leiden 1966.
Gudlaugsson 1968.
Robinson 1974.
Philadelphia 1984: 248–253.
Brown/MacLaren 1992: 253–254.

1937.1.57 (57)

The Intruder

c. 1660
Oil on oak, 66.6 x 59.4 (26½ x 23¾)
Andrew W. Mellon Collection

Inscriptions

On the step to the bed beneath the white skirt of the central figure: *G. Metsu*

Technical Notes: The original support, an oak panel with vertical grain, has been thinned, backed, and cradled. An x-radiograph taken in 1940 shows the painting prior to cradling and suggests the panel is composed of a single board. Paint is applied smoothly over an off-white ground in a thin series of glazes in the darks and more thickly in the lights,